



**THE
PREVENT PEERS PROGRAMME**
October 09 - March 10



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The Prevent Peers Programme

(October 2009 – March 2010)

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1.0 Introduction

Faith Matters (www.faith-matters.org) has successfully completed the Prevent Peers programme which supported faith leaders¹, elected members and officers on the Prevent agenda within 8 local authorities in the West Midlands region. The local authorities that the programme covered included Birmingham, Sandwell and Dudley, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Telford and Wrekin, Solihull and Coventry. Stoke on Trent opted out of the scheme.²

The project provided 5 training sessions (per participant) as well as on-line and telephony support to participants from October 2009 to March 2010. The Prevent Peers programme has provided that support in a consistent, ongoing and accessible manner whilst assisting and facilitating further discussions about developments in Prevent. This was essential and ensured that elected members, faith leaders and officers felt that there was support available when they needed it on a fast moving, complex and contentious agenda.

We are very sensitive to the fact that Prevent has been contentious and the language and training took into account the sensitivities around the agenda.

The Prevent Peers programme took a more holistic view of the Prevent agenda through the 5 sessions which totalled 15 hours of training per participant. Participants were urged *to attend all of the sessions*; which included the following:

- *Al Qaeda and Violent Extremism (session 1)*
- *Extremist Ideologies. What are They? Who are They Aimed at? (sessions 2 and 3)*
- *What does Prevent Mean to Councillors and Potential Radicalisation Narratives in other faith communities? (session 4)*
- *Media Training and Dealing with Emergency Response Situations for Councillors (session 5)*

1.1 Telephony and E-mail Support

Part of the support package that came with this programme involved mobile and telephony support up to the end of March 2010. The telephony support involved direct support by Cllr Fiyaz Mughal, who has over 3 years of experience in Prevent and 6 years of work within the cohesion agenda. Further support was also provided by Cllr Mahroof Hussain who is the portfolio holder for Communities in Rotherham and who has also been involved in the Prevent agenda for 3-4 years. Both Fiyaz and Mahroof were also involved in working groups that were part of the Task Force set up by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, post the 7/7 bombings. They are also both IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency) accredited peer mentors on Prevent work.

¹ These included Imams, priests etc and those who religiously led institutions in which prayer took place.

² It was decided after discussions with officers at the local authority that the programme would not include them in the 09/10 training round.

Furthermore, the Prevent Peers programme had councillors working within it from all of the three main political parties.

E-mail support was also available through the following e-mail address, preventpeers@faith-matters.co.uk. Responses were provided within 48 hours of the enquiry being received.

2.0 Complementing the work of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

The IDeA provides short term targeted solutions on Prevent to local authorities. Its work involves assessing the needs of the local authority and then bringing in the services of an elected member and peer officer to provide some of the solutions through discussions and facilitated sessions. This work continues to be vital and will have more of relevance after the May 6th elections. The IDeA should be commended for the excellent work that it has been undertaking since 2009 and the range of local authorities it has engaged with.

However, the IDeA should not be the only solution to elected member engagement and other bodies with a focus on communities and with the relevant expertise can and should play a supportive role. Nor should the importance of the IDeA be minimised since it has a standing with elected members and continues to draw on expertise. The Prevent Peers programme effectively filled a gap in service provision and provided longer term support to local authorities through the provision of a wider range of learning and development sessions. (These sessions took into account a wider range of issues). The sessions were developed after meetings with local authorities and looked at issues which were impacting in some areas such as the growth of the Far Right.

One of the main achievements of such a programme was to disentangle issues around extremist Al-Qaeda narratives from being conflated with the wider Muslim community and Islam. This is important to raise since it was clear through the sessions which elected members were at, that they were conflating the issues together. This was due to a lack of good and credible information about Islam and local Muslim populations which should have specifically been targeted at elected members.

3.0 Delivery of Training

The first set of training was provided to the following local authorities; Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley. Each of the local authorities had similar requirements for the training. The second set of sessions was provided to Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull and the final delivery took place with Telford and Wrekin.

Within these local authorities, elected member engagement mainly took place through the following authorities; Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley, Birmingham and Solihull. Faith leaders also attended and officers

were mainly in attendance in Telford and Wrekin. (A full breakdown of numbers of attendees is provided though a few attendees chose not to or failed to complete the evaluation forms).

4.0 Engagement with Elected Members, Faith Leaders and Officers

Local authorities within this programme were visited by the Director of Faith Matters and an assessment of their needs made. The assessment allowed the training packages to be adapted to meet local demographic and political needs. Some of the discussions raised potential political barriers to work on Prevent funded programmes whilst other discussions took into account the potential positions that Far Right elected members may take if they wanted to target the programme for political statements.

During the course of the programme, Faith Matters' staff initially contacted elected members and faith leaders with a detailed HTML mail-shot which was sent twice. Attendees could mark the HTML mail-shot as to which sessions they wanted to attend. Furthermore, a letter was sent outlining the training available and directing individuals to the Prevent Peers e-mail address so that they could e-mail through their requirements. Finally, each individual was called at least twice by staff within the Organisation so as to ensure that we could raise the profile of the training. Prevent officers within the local authorities also received the promotional materials.

Telford and Wrekin opted to co-ordinate the attendance of officers and elected members and this was undertaken by officers for all of the sessions held there.

4.1 The Need for Prevent Training

It is clear from work within Prevent that the language used to badge programmes can be inclusive or exclusive. Some local authorities have chosen to take the cohesion route though it has to be said that there are distinct differences between the community cohesion programme and Prevent work. To acknowledge the importance of community cohesion as the foundation on which to build Prevent work, we included a session that looked at interfaith tensions in a few areas in the West Midlands that have affected cohesion within those areas. Such community tensions can lead to Prevent work being sidelined or further viewed through the lens of interventionist social programmes that are then labelled very negatively by these communities. The interfaith tensions and impacts on community cohesion are highlighted through a research report called the Adab or 'Respect' research report which can be found on the Faith Matters web-site, www.faith-matters.org and through the following link: http://www.faith-matters.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=147&Itemid=233

It was also clear within the delivery of the programmes that there is the need for continued and sustained work within the West Midlands region and we have started what should be a longer term process in the region. However, Faith Matters has identified a number of issues which make clear that

member engagement needs to be built upon, and these issues are listed below. Solutions to these issues are provided later in this report:

- Member engagement is low and the relevance of Prevent to local authority elected members needs further work to reinforce it. The Prevent Peers programme has started this process and has provided multiple themes on which to engage elected members, faith leaders and officers.
- Some members believe that Prevent is within the domain of the relevant portfolio holder and therefore do not take ownership of it. This needs to change and engagement from opposition group members is also an area that needs further work and input.
- There were existing tensions between the portfolio holder and colleagues which meant that information sharing was limited in a few local authorities. However, it must be added that the majority of local authorities were not impacted upon by this problem.
- Elected members reverted back to community cohesion and a clear and distinguishing line between Prevent and cohesion was provided. However, it is also clear that at a national level, a simple and clear distinguishing line / feature still needs to be developed which is succinct and which makes the point clearly to individuals. Long convoluted discussions on what Prevent and cohesion are simply raise more questions.
- Engagement from Muslim councillors is still low and whilst the Prevent Peers programme undertook a very sensitive approach to the learning and development sessions, it was clear that these councillors were caught in a difficult position. Some felt that by engaging there would be political ramifications for them through the electorate, whilst others simply disagreed with Prevent. This was picked up by the Director of Faith Matters in telephone conversations with the elected members. Such difficulties will continue within the agenda and it is difficult to see how this cycle can be overcome unless the agenda itself is rebranded, though there could be interesting opportunities post the elections on May the 6th.
- It is also interesting to note there was good engagement from elected members who were non-Muslim though who had large faith communities in their wards. This interesting nuance needs further exploration.

4.2 Key Findings from the Prevent Peers Programme

This section lists some of the key findings from the discussions that took place within the sessions. They are listed in three categories that focus on elected members, faith leaders and officers:

4.2.1 Elected Members

- The role of Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT Teams) was discussed within the Prevent Peers programme and this was useful in developing further discourse and discussion and in making the work more relevant

to elected members. Allied to this Neighbourhood Development Teams and the role of an elected member themselves were discussed so as to find linkage points to Prevent that made the agenda more practical and real to elected members in particular. (Elected members had to be able to see the relevance to their wards).

- On several occasions elected members raised the point that their work involved representing residents and that also meant working on issues that affected cohesion, especially when cohesion was affected by the divisive actions of the Far Right. They had found themselves working to support cohesion and Prevent was therefore seen as being potentially divisive. On the one hand, they were working to support greater community interaction whilst Prevent meant that there was a greater focus on one community. They suggested that a regular factsheet which was made accessible to them and which showed the impacts of Prevent on cohesion (and vice versa) would be useful. Within this process there was therefore a continuing tension for elected members; they suggested that their perspectives were different from individuals who could 'implement' and support Prevent. Their role could be to support an understanding of Prevent though there was a fine line between their advocacy role as elected community representatives and then pushing a social agenda on residents. This needs further work on with elected members and this will become more relevant post the General Election when London has elections across the local authorities.
- Elected members supported the need for greater information on Islam since through discussions, it was clear that there was a conflation between Islam, Muslims and Al Qaeda related ideology. Issues such as Sharia were also raised within the training sessions on Islam and Muslim communities and this was raised by elected members. There is a sense of confusion and conflation which needs addressing especially at an elected member level and less so at the faith leaders level.
- Looking at actual case examples of where councillors had to work through arrests³ in areas provided excellent discussion opportunities. They also brought home the community leadership role of elected members and the need for councillors to 'know their areas and their wards'. This was further highlighted through the example we provided of the work of Cllr Clyde Loakes, who was then the Council Leader of Waltham Forest. He describes how after the arrest of individuals in Waltham Forest in 2006, he had to work intensively with Muslim communities and acknowledged that there were far more faith institutions in the Borough than had ever been realised; it seems that only a few mosques were engaged with the local authority and the assumption by elected members was that they were the only ones in the area. After the 2006 arrests, other mosques and faith institutions were engaged with so that the community as a whole could come together after the arrests and that no community was isolated and felt targeted during this very difficult period.

³ (under Anti-Terrorism legislation)

- Elected members found it useful to have input from the West Midlands Police. It also provided a different perspective to the discussions though there were different implications for faith leaders, who voiced some apprehension of the Police being involved.
- Throughout the West Midlands sessions, elected members discussed the pressures of having to work through demonstrations that were having an impact in the region. These included 'march throughs' like those which happened in Birmingham. The English Defence League and the corresponding Anti-Fascist counter-demonstrations were alienating and creating a sense of fear within communities. Elected members talked about the linkages to cohesion and Prevent, though there are continuing concerns for elected members and therefore longer term support is required.
- Some elected members raised the issues that both Prevent and cohesion require all political parties to be sensitive to them and not to inject politicization into these areas in the council chamber. There was also a feeling that after May 6th there could well be changes to both areas and elected members therefore suggested greater support will be needed after May 6th.
- It was also suggested that training like the Prevent Peers programme would be required for Safer Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood Management Teams. Further comments were raised around Prevent and the impact at a grass roots level; elected members suggested that this issue could possibly be picked up for discussion with local residents through a standing item on Area Committee agendas on safety and security, though this could be badged differently through local discussions with ward councillors.
- Some members talked about the need for information sharing around local threat profiles. There was a need for information sharing between the portfolio holder, the Chief Executive and local Police and opposition councillors suggested that the opposition portfolio holder should also be party to some of the information.
- Members agreed that the sessions linked clearly to the PVE objectives.

4.2.2 Faith Leaders

- It was clear from feedback from Faith Leaders that they had assumed that Prevent was more relevant to Muslim communities. There was discussion on this and the messaging within the Prevent Peers programme consistently pushed the fact that Prevent is the responsibility of all communities. (There is, however, further work that needs to be undertaken through nationally focussed messages that promote the responsibility for *all* communities. It is not just an 'issue for Muslim communities'.)
- There was hesitancy for the Police to be engaged through discussions and this had to be managed. More than ever, faith leaders wanted the opportunity to use the sessions for honest and sometimes difficult discussions in terms of the role of the Police and other agencies.
- Faith leaders raised the point that the Far Right was in the process of hijacking Christianity and the Far Right had been using faith in order to

promote their political views. There was some synergy here, since Al Qaeda also attempted to hijack Islam and to promote its political views. Greater synergy in activities and co-ordination on these elements could be undertaken, it was suggested, between Muslim and Christian faith leaders.

- Some faith leaders were disappointed that their councillors did not attend the sessions and there were discussions about the need for elected members to work more closely with faith leaders and beyond just the 'pigeon hole' of faith forum meetings.
- Faith leaders welcomed the Prevent Peers training since it was the first time that such training was made available to them. Many welcomed the opportunity to learn from such sessions and more importantly, to have a platform in which open and honest discussions could take place. They welcomed the opportunity to be kept informed on developments within Prevent.

4.2.3 Local Authority Officers

- The impact on the work of front-line officers was discussed. The real impact of the learning and development sessions, it was felt, was to ensure that front-line officers realised the need to be aware of issues that fell under Prevent in their day to day roles. This did not however mean that the interface and interaction with members of the public would change.
- Sessions provided officers with a strong outline of the narratives of the Far Right and an insight into their repositioning towards political acceptability. This was an area, it was suggested, where further advice, information and support was needed.
- Participants discussed WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) and that it was a package for practitioners and for officers. However, it was felt that WRAP may not be directly in line with what elected members needed. Some further work on this is required and possibly the production of a package of materials specifically drawn up and put together by elected members.

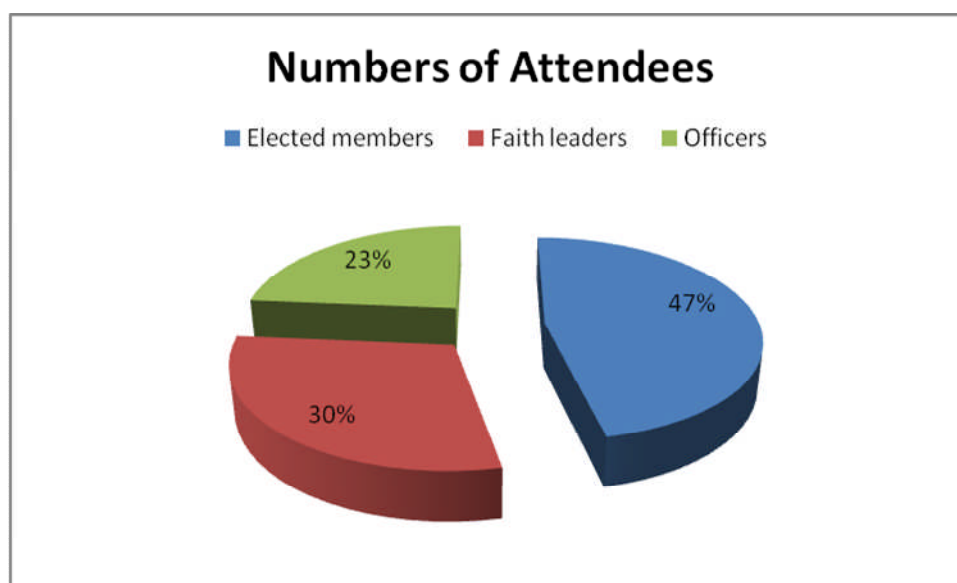
5.0 Recommendations

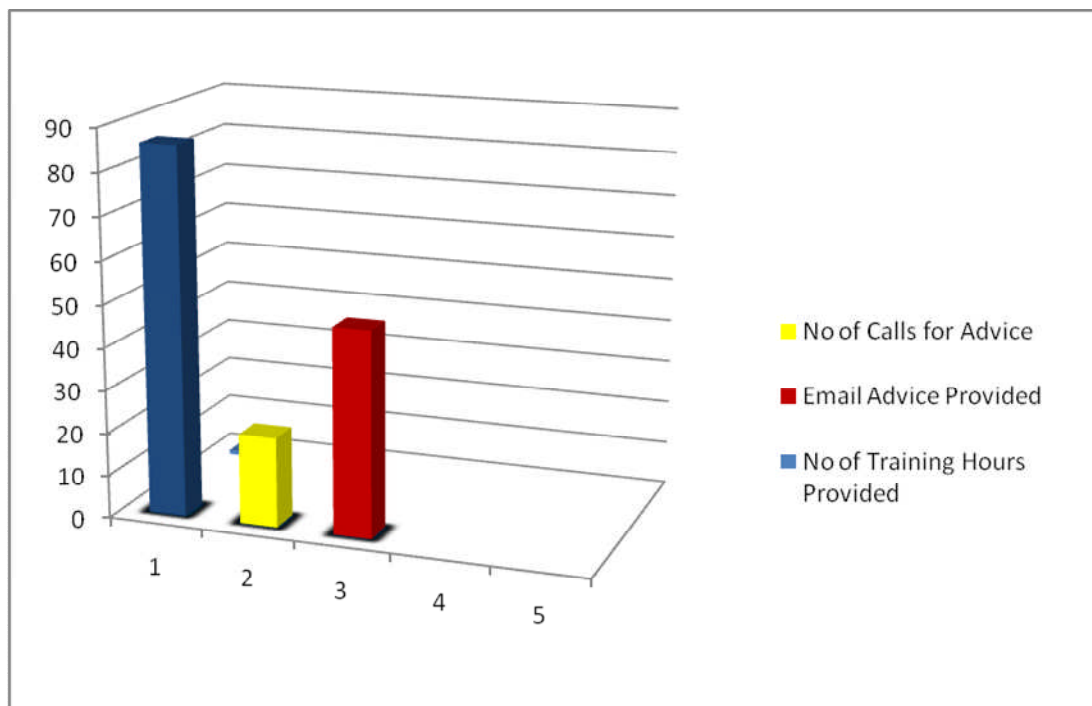
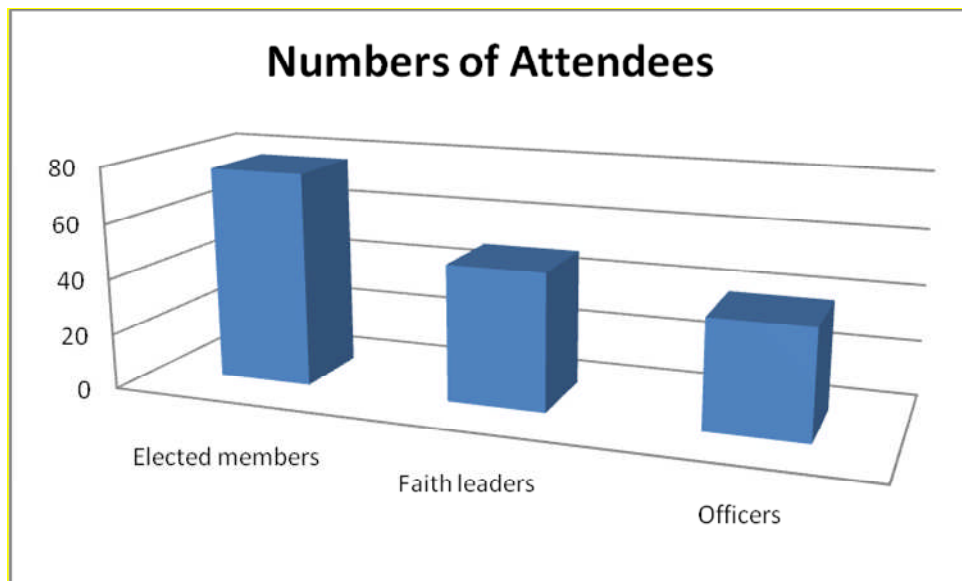
- Post the May elections it is imperative that the programme be focused once again on the West Midlands and widened to also include the East Midlands region. There is also a supporting role to play to the IDeA post the 'all up' local elections in London.
- Further work (both face to face engagement and research work) needs to be undertaken to find out why engagement by Muslim councillors is low even though there may be large faith based communities in their wards. This seems to be opposite to the case of councillors who are non-Muslim and with large faith based communities in their respective wards.
- Continuing English Defence League and Anti-Fascist demonstrations are causing real difficulties for members in the West Midlands area. There will also be ramifications for elected members in the East

Midlands area where such groups have been demonstrating. From discussions within the Prevent Peers programme it is essential that elected members receive support, advice and fora in which to come together apolitically and discuss the ongoing concerns.

- Elected members also suggested possible changes to Prevent and cohesion if a new Government is elected. Whilst these changes may not be drastic, it reinforces the need for information sharing post the May local elections.
- Elected members raised the need for training such as that provided through the Prevent Peers programme to Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Neighbourhood Management teams. This needs to be explored directly with the local authorities involved.
- It is clear that the Prevent Peers programme provided the first learning and development opportunity that faith leaders had on Prevent. It was the first real opportunity to be able to question practitioners in the field and to have open and honest discussions. It also allowed faith leaders to discuss the impacts of Prevent on their respective congregations, instead of it just being perceived as an issue affecting one community.
- In relation to officer support, further information on Far Right narratives and activities are required. This is even more so as Far Right groups have openly suggested disrupting Prevent activities in areas. Such up to date information is needed and may include setting up a research and information hub through community focussed organisations which can inform and work with PVE officers in local authorities.
- An 'elected member' version of WRAP targeted at members may be of value in getting wider member level engagement. This proposal is something that could be developed through members and an independent development and delivery organisation.

6.0 Statistics







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